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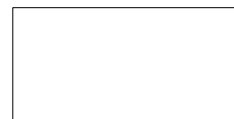


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FEATURES





## 'American hero' buried

Medal winner remembered as fun loving

By **CHUCK REED**

Special to The Advocate



**Advocate staff photo by Richard Alan Hannon**

Members of the Marine Corps League escort Marine Pfc. Raymond 'Mike' Clausen Jr.'s body Monday into St. Joseph Catholic Church in Ponchatoula. Clausen, a Ponchatoula resident and Medal of Honor recipient for his service in Vietnam, died May 30.

PONCHATOULA --- Raymond "Mike" Clausen Jr., a Medal of Honor recipient for his Vietnam War service, was buried Monday with more ceremony than most of his friends said he would have been comfortable with.

Clausen, 56, of Ponchatoula was eulogized by his commander in Vietnam as "a true American hero who knew what he was going into that day" when he displayed the valor that won him the Medal of Honor.

"I told all my men to stay in that aircraft," retired Lt. Col. Walter Ledbetter said of that day. "Every time I landed that aircraft, he got out when he saw Marines who needed help. He had to get out."

Several friends of Clausen spoke candidly about him at a reception, paid for by Texas billionaire H. Ross Perot, after the burial.

Clausen, who rescued six Marines by carrying them through a mine field under heavy North Vietnamese ground fire Jan. 31, 1970, was a blunt, fun-loving, hard drinking, two-fisted man, whose e-mail signature line was "Death before Dishonor."

About five dozen uniformed Marines, Army, Navy and Air Force servicemen, both active and retired, attended the services. Retired Maj. Gen. James E. Livingston, former commandant of the Marine Corps Reserves, and Lt. Gen. Dennis M. McCarthy, current commandant of the reserves, also attended.

Mike Thornton of Houston, who served as a Navy SEAL in Vietnam, said at the funeral, "He was just one of the guys, and that's the way he liked it."

Thornton quoted from the book, "These Good Men," by Marine Infantry Capt. Michael Norman:

"I know now why men who have been to war reunite, to be with men who once acted their best ... stripped raw, down to their humanity ... I've never given men so much trust."

Ledbetter said Clausen flew 1,960 combat missions in Vietnam.

"He had done this over and over," Ledbetter said. "How can you be surprised at what he did? God called him home; he needed a crew chief."

Several men wore uniforms from the Vietnam War era.

Ed "Grizzly" Smiley of Baton Rouge, a former Marine infantryman, wore civilian clothes and had long hair and a beard reaching his chest.

"Mike ... told me he was in trouble half the time, but he was the best," Smiley said.

Matt Templar of Independence said Clausen "didn't get his (private first class) stripe back until after he won the Medal of Honor. He was humble, but blunt."

"I remember one night we were in a bar, and there was some guy with a fake Medal of Honor who was bragging," Templar said. "Mike knew he shouldn't be wearing it in a bar, and then after talking to him a minute, realized it was fake. He took him outside and left him there."

The consensus of those at the reception who knew Clausen was that he was not a poster boy for the U.S. Marine Corps or much of a parade-day Marine. To a man, they said they did or would have gladly trusted him with their lives.

Rick Lottie, a Vietnam Marine helicopter veteran, said, "He was humorously irreverent, but deeply respectful."

Clausen worked as an inspector for Boeing Aircraft after he returned from Vietnam. After losing an eye and suffering life-threatening injuries in a car wreck, Clausen retired.

His wife, Lois, said injuries from that wreck kept them from having children. She was with him when he died in a Dallas hospital.

License plates on cars in the funeral procession stretching for more than a mile from St. Joseph Catholic Church to the Ponchatoula City Cemetery included Idaho and California.

Johnice Daniel of the Red Wing American Indian Teaching Center in Husser circled Clausen's casket after the formal ceremonies, tapping the sides with a handful of feathers.

"The seven eagle feathers have been passed down for three generations. They go back to the 1970s," she said.

She said the ceremony is done for heroes, "fallen warriors, who defended our culture and our land."

The Rev. Justin Kauchak of St. Joseph's, said at the church service, "He served the Lord in his own way and fit the definition of a just man."

Deacon Linwood Liner, who shared officiating with Kauchak, said he had

known Clausen for 25 years.

"Our Savior reached down from Heaven and said, 'Mike, it's time,'" Liner said. "Imagine the scene: Mike arrives at the Pearly Gates, knocks and hears a voice, 'Who goes there?' 'Pfc. Raymond Mike Clausen Jr.' he replies. 'Enter, the Father says, welcome home.'"

With Clausen's passing, Louisiana has lost two of its three living Medal of Honor recipients in the past eight months.

Edward Schowalter Jr., a native of New Orleans, was awarded the Medal of Honor for his actions during the Korean War.

Schowalter, who died on Nov. 21, was the first lieutenant in command of Company A, 31st Regiment, 7th Infantry Division.

On Oct. 14, 1952, near Kumhwa, Korea, Schowalter was leading an attack when his 1st Platoon came under heavy small-arms and mortar fire 50 yards from the objective, according to his Medal of Honor citation.



**Advocate staff photo by Richard Alan Hannon**

Medal of Honor recipient Mike Thornton, left, along with Lt. Gen. Dennis McCarthy, commandant of the U.S. Marines Corps Reserves, show their respect as Raymond 'Mike' Clausen Jr.'s body is placed into position Monday at Ponchatoula City Cemetery.

Despite being wounded by a grenade, Schowalter rallied led his company and led it into the enemy trenches before he was wounded again. He refused to be evacuated until the position was secured.

Louisiana's only living Medal of HONor recipient is Jefferson Deblanc, a native of Lockport, who received the award for his actions in World War II.

Deblanc was a captain with Marine Fighting Squadron 112 in the Pacific Theater.

According to his citation, on Jan. 31, 1943, Deblanc's squadron was flying cover for a group of dive bombers and torpedo planes when they attacked a group of Japanese Zeros trying to attack the bombers.


Deblanc helped stop the attack and later downed two Zeroes even though his low fuel later forced him to parachute on an enemy-held island.

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